

PREFACES

WRITING SAMPLER



Søren Kierkegaard

Edited and Translated by

Todd W. Nichol

with Introduction and Notes

PREFACES

WRITING SAMPLE

KIERKEGAARD'S WRITINGS, IX



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by Søren Kierkegaard

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Todd W. Nichol

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HISTORICAL INTRODUCTION

During two weeks in June of 1844, Søren Kierkegaard published four books. The first of these works, *Three Uprooting Discourses*, appeared on June 5. Signed by Kierkegaard in his own name, this collection epitomizes the religious works that regularly accompanied the pseudonymous writings of this period. Five days later came *Philosophical Fragments, or a Fragment of Philosophy*, by Johannes Climacus and signed by S. Kierkegaard, a condensed work on philosophical and Christian issues normally attributed to Kierkegaard's authorship. This was followed on June 12 by *The Concept of Anxiety*, a book unique among the pseudonymous writings for its direct pedagogical style. Attributed to the pseudonym Vigilius Haufniensis, this work on soteriology in relation to Christian dogmatics was in Kierkegaard's judgment essentially different from the other pseudonymous writings. Furthermore, although it had a signed counterpart among the upbuilding discourses, it also had a mate of a different sort, published simultaneously with *Anxiety* on June 17, the satirical *Preface* by Nicholas Notarius. In the account of his authorship included in *Concluding Unscientific Postscript to Philosophical Fragments*, Kierkegaard emphasized the simultaneity as well as the intentional pairing of the serious and the satirical in this conjunction of works.¹

The Concept of Anxiety and *Preface* were indeed written and readied for publication during the same period. The seventh section of *Preface* seems originally to have been intended to introduce *The Concept of Anxiety*, but it was transferred to its present position when Kierkegaard decided that it did not comport with the purpose and style of the completed larger work. Kierkegaard, however, still wished to make public what he had intended to say in the original preface. With this and other

¹ See *Essays*, pp. 206–7. (KJCVIII:181–182:226–29). A similar pairing occurs with *Christian Discourses* and *The Cause and Cure of the Life of an Atoner* (KJCVIII:187–190), published on April 26, 1848, and July 21–27, 1848, respectively.

purposes initially, he worked on several polemical projects during the period 1843–47.⁴

The dates of these efforts are undated but located within specified periods by the Danish editors of Kierkegaard's papers. While the chronology cannot be precisely determined, the sequence is evident on the basis of internal evidence. The earliest of the polemical writings specifically related to *Pygmaet* was "New Year's Gift" by Nicolaus Notabene.⁵ The use of this pseudonym in the projected work and the inclusion in it of some material originally written in 1843–44 as portions of a response to a review of *Repetition* by the literary critic Johan Ludvig Heiberg (1791–1860) indicate that "New Year's Gift" preceded the more fully developed *Pygmaet*. Although skeptical, "New Year's Gift" reveals the development of a critical attack on Heiberg, the evolution of a humorous approach to characters sketched in *The Concept of Anxiety*, and the origins of Kierkegaard's parody in *Pygmaet* of the lesser New Year's books produced in nineteenth-century Denmark for presentation as Christmas gifts.

Kierkegaard integrated elements of "New Year's Gift" into *Pygmaet* along with some material's printed even earlier. A portion of an early version of "Preface IV," satirizing New Year's books, was originally appended to an unpublished response to Heiberg's criticism of *Repetition*.⁶ This focus on New Year's Literature was later carried over into the preparation of "New Year's Gift" and finally merged into *Pygmaet*. Other passages initially

⁴ See, for example, Supplement, no. 17, 18 (*SKS*, V, A, 1–6).

⁵ See Supplement, pp. 132–133 (*SKS*, IV, B, 1, 1–2).

⁶ See J. L. Heiberg, *Udvalgte Skrifter for 1844* (Copenhagen, 1846), 376 (11–67), pp. 28–30; these eight manuscript pages, in his own purposes, possess the concepts now Kierkegaard's *Pygmaet*. Kierkegaard never returned to Heiberg but did not publish them. See *Kierkegaard Supplement*, pp. 281–313, 317–31 (*SKS*, VI, 1–2), 11–17, and no. 379–83, no. 11. Heiberg had also commented earlier negatively on *Engels' Origin of Love's Unhappiness* ("Literary Works: Grimm, *Intelligensbladet*, 21, March 11, 1843; Kierkegaard replied in *Samtiden*, 1108, March 3, 1843; see "A Word of Thanks to Frederik Heiberg," *The Coester Album*, no. 17–21, *SKS*, XII, 36–38 [11–13]). See also *Journal of B. Supplement*, no. 3, 6–10, 11, 13–15 (*SKS*, IV, 1, 2, 3, 4, 5).

⁷ See Supplement, p. 39 (*SKS*, V, B, 1, 1–2). See also *Kierkegaard Supplement*, p. 201, 3–4, 51 (*SKS*, VI, 1, 1–2).

included in Kierkegaard's or published response to Heiberg were also eventually incorporated into *Prefaces*.⁶ Originally prepared to introduce *The Concept of Anxiety*, "Preface VII" in its present location is both a comment on that work as well as an effort of its author to interpret. The remaining sections of *Prefaces* were prepared specifically for the publisher's work. In its final form, *Prefaces* is a result of Kierkegaard's practice of working on several projects at various desks at the same time, of "multiple writing," as the editors of *Søren Kierkegaard's Journals and Papers* have aptly termed it.⁷

The decision to make the publisher volume a collection of prefaces without a book to follow them, and yet to introduce the whole with a preface of its own, signals Kierkegaard's satirical intent. The curious form of *Prefaces* invites the interested reader to wonder whether there is not more of a book here than might be expected. The position of the work in Kierkegaard's authorship is, of course, a hint of that, and the text is strewn with clues to the author's intention. In form and substance, *Prefaces* exemplifies satire etymologically defined as *satira*, as a "mixed dith" or medley of comic irony.

In its immediate context, *Prefaces* is Kierkegaard's satirical response to critics of his pseudonymous works, particularly J. L. Heiberg. In Kierkegaard's view, Heiberg and other critics had neither read nor discussed these books with care. In response, Kierkegaard wrote in the margin of an entry which might not get his works published: "he took the conventional scholar's marginal remark, 'Not or Notable [Not well!]' as his pseudonym."⁸

Although the work is addressed to readers and critics in general and, against all facile writing and reading, Kierkegaard keeps

⁶ See, for example, *Repetition*, Supplement, p. 285, KH VI (Pg. IV B 11), p. 298, and p. 299 (Pg. IV B 12), p. 278; Cf. p. 24 below.

⁷ See *JP V 572b* (Pg. V B 47:13), note 188.

⁸ In the year prior to the publication of *Prefaces*, Kierkegaard considered the pseudonym Narsaire for another project (but it simply "lacked," but he did not select it in *Journal*, See *Suppl.*, note p. 100 (JP V 467), Pg. IV A 117). So perhaps the name of Narsaire Narsaire is a parody on the name of the New York City publisher, William S. Appleton. See Supplement, pp. 112-113 (See KH VI 35-36 and 37, Pg. V A 99).

J. L. Heiberg particularly in view throughout *Pagfas*, a fact not lost on contemporary readers: “Preface III” and “Preface IV” are, among other things, comic attacks on Heiberg’s remarks on Either/Or and his comments on *Reperitio*. In his luxuriously printed New Year’s booz, *Udsnit, Årsag for 1844*, Heiberg himself never responded publicly to *Pagfas*, but readers of the day knew that the lance had struck its mark. Kierkegaard’s antagonism, at a few years later, Peder Lucvig Møller (1814–1867), for example, said of *Pagfas* that it was “not only source of the greatest but, unconditionally, the most elegant of what has been written against Heiberg. . . . I do not remember any polemical writing in Danish as excellent.”¹ Although *Pagfas* received comparatively little public attention when it was published, perhaps in part because of Heiberg’s decision not to comment directly on it, and so to draw it to insignificance among Copenhagen’s cultural elite, what attention it did receive in the contemporary press quickly focused on the polemic against him.² “We have spoken,” a contemporary review reported, “with various people who immediately seemed to betray a certain acquaintance with Herman Nottelberg’s *Pagfas* as well as with Vigilius Haufmann’s book *The Concept of Activity* and S. Kierkegaard’s *Philosophical Fragments* and his late *Concluding Discourses*. But, strangely enough, every time we wanted to go into one or another of these works a little, they always referred to the comments about Prof. Heiberg in *The Postscript*.”³ A few years later the press returned the favor to Kierkegaard when a sentence from *Pagfas* was revealed as a caption to a malicious cartoon caricaturing him as an equine man.⁴

Kierkegaard’s casual, as it seemed to J. L. Heiberg’s criticism of the latter’s more dogmatic work, was, however, only a hint of

¹ *Udsnit* (1843–1844), 17, pp. 94–95.

² See Coester-Jones, KJXIII for his comment, or P. L. Møller and Miché Søren.

³ See *Udsnit* for 1844, p. 748, ser. 130, KJXVI.

⁴ See *Udsnit* for 1846, Georg Lorenz Bernhard Christensen, ed. (Orsted Christian System, II, 12, item 3), 1886, col. 90. See also *Sigsø*, Supplement, p. 648, KJXVII by VLB 184, p. 250, and p. 7–8, row 138.

⁵ See p. 7, item 7. See Coester-Jones Supplement, pp. 123–24, KJXVIII, for the article in *Udsnit* 278, January 15, 1846, col. 2–8.

date occasion for the publishing of *Prefaces*. Nor did it derive its comment on reading and literary criticism exclusively from Kierkegaard's intentions for this work. *Prefaces* is also a more general reckoning with Danish Hegelianism, represented in literature by J. L. Heiberg and in theology by Hans Lassen Martensen (1805–884), then a professor in the theological faculty at Copenhagen and later to become Bishop of Sjælland.

Prefaces continues in comic mode. Its attack on Danish Hegelianism minimal in earlier works and soon to be more fully developed in *Slogter* and *Postscript*. Satirical comment on speculative idealism in Danish dress surfaces early in *Prefaces* when Nicolaus Notabene mocks those who promise a philosophical system but never write it and later when he makes a burlesque of J. J. Heiberg's promises to develop a philosophical system comprehensive enough to include an astonishing array of arcane studies including, among other things, astrology. The final two prefaces are an extreme lampoon of Danish Hegelianism. Here, in comic form, are some of the themes from earlier works, particularly the unpublished "Johannes Climacus, or De Omnibus Dubitandum Est" and topics that will occupy Kierkegaard in major works to come: epigones who claim originality for themselves, the philosophical system as a grandiose illusion, mediation as intellectual's cigar of hand, pretentious scholarly language, a philosophy that claims to understand everything but the self and likely hence doubt that cannot doubt all things and thus does not direct itself to that which is most important. Wondering in print about how to address confusions in these matters, Nicolaus Notabene speculates at length on what a proper philosophical periodical might look like, and thereby introduces into this little book, ironically presented as if it had no proper genre of its own, a virtual treatment of yet another literary form, intellectual journalism. Kierkegaard appears in this period actually to have considered publication of such a periodical.⁶

Just as *Prefaces* encapsulates Kierkegaard's confrontation with Danish Hegelianism, it also prefigures Kierkegaard's final collection with Danish Christians: in what is certainly a direct

⁶ For a preliminary sketch of such a journal, see Supplement, p. 110 (pp. 8 & 110).

referred to H. L. Martensen, Kierkegaard attacks theologians who claim to be an "inferior philosopher in response to the demands of the times and who reintegrates Christian theology in a system like Hegel's, while claiming to have gone beyond him." This provides again the Danish degrammar and ecclesiastic is preceded by ironic but respectful comment on Jakob Peter Myrster (1775–1851), Bishop of Sjælland and religious mentor to younger Danes. These remarks are an indirect contribution to a controversy between Myrster and an Odense schoolmaster later to become an admirer of Kierkegaard, Haas Peter Kofsted-Hansen (1813–1893). Kofsted-Hansen had argued in an inflammatory article that the Danish Church, through want of philosophical sophistication, had alienated the cultured.¹⁸ In a sharp and balanced reply, Myrster refuted the claim that Christianity needed a "philosophical bath" to make it respectable, citing Kierkegaard's *For and Tending and Udvikling* *Daarom* as the work of a cultivated person of high. Entering this debate, Niclaus Notabene ironically proposes the publication of a suitable devotional book for the cultured and takes the occasion to display an up-to-date intellectual's contempt for a collection of sermons by Myrster. *Prædikerens gamle Sprog og Gøddigtige i Guds* work Kierkegaard knew as a youth and continued to use in later years.¹⁹ In disparaging these sermons, Niclaus Notabene points out that they are unoriginal by any systematic tendency, are suitable in form for daily devotional reading, are ever timely by virtue of their neglect of current events, and directed to the interests of the self alone. The pseudonymous deprecation of these works is an ironic expression of gratitude on the part of Søren Kierkegaard. These appreciative comments on Myrster are indeed Kierkegaard's last published mention of the pastor who mentored him and who later became the leading cleric of Denmark. This reference to Myrster also points toward the con-

¹⁸ Kofsted-Hansen's article appears in *Udbydte*, Copenhagen, 1842, in *Samlede Skrifter af Haas Peter Kofsted-Hansen*, IV, 1843, pp. 384–89.

¹⁹ See Kof. "Kirkelig Udvikling," *Udbydte*, Copenhagen, IV, 4, 47 (1842), 178–84, pp. 97–102. Kof. was Myrster's personal friend from a childhood in the same neighborhood in Odense (Kof. *Udbydte*, IV, 4, 5).

²⁰ H. L. Martensen, *Udbydte*, I, 2, 309.

clusion of the authorship. Appearing as it does in a book containing attacks credited to H. L. Martensen, his portion of *Pegibers* anticipates Kierkegaard's attack on Martensen for his designation of Mynster in a funeral oration as a "truth-witness" and the polemical battle that followed, ending with Kierkegaard's death in 1855.

That, however, lay in the unknown future when Kierkegaard wrote *Pegibers*. In their proximate context, Nicholas Notander's comments on Mynster's devotional work reveal something of Kierkegaard's immediate intent. The frequent use of the phrase "the cultured [*de Dannede*]" in this context signifies an engagement not only with Mynster's critic, Kuford Hartvig, but with the social transition underway in Denmark in the nineteenth years just before the revolution of 1848. The phrase "the cultured" was claimed both by advocates of liberal reform, among them Peter Martin Orla Lehmann (1816–1870), against whom Kierkegaard had written as a youth,¹² and by the conservative guardians of Denmark's retrospective high culture, including J. T. Leiberger and J. P. Mynster. The satire in *Pegibers* is directed against both factions when Kierkegaard presents "culture [*Dannede*]" as a collective, socializing experience that, misconstrued and abused, can lead individuals into abandoning their proper responsibility for themselves. As Kierkegaard employs it, the satirical *Pegibers* functions at a much deeper level. In the specific instance of Kierkegaard's satirical treatment of Notander's satire of Mynster as minister to cultured Christians, negative criticism is converted into constructive proposals for devotional literature actually appropriate to the times. *Christens Dødsord*, signed by Søren Kierkegaard and published in the revolutionary year 1848, was intended to be read as an example of such.¹³

¹² See "To Mr. Orla Lehmann," *Early Writings*, vol. 1, pp. 24–60, EHD 1 (MEX), 28–61.

¹³ For a full text of *Christens Dødsord* with commentary by J. P. Mynster as Kierkegaard originally intended, see the commentary of Mynster's devotional writings provided in early Søren Kierkegaard's impending last work, *Christian Considerations in Denmark*. For an evaluation of *Christens Dødsord* as a devotional work, see "Gesamtlige Erindringer om aarstiftens dødning," in Søren Kierkegaard, *Christens Dødsord*, ed. and tr. Emanuel Hirsch (Tübingen, Cologne: Eugène Desclée's Verlag, 1952), pp. vii–ix.

gaard's journals indicate that as late as 1847 he thought of publishing a volume of his work along with other pieces as a four-part "mystification" to be called "The Writings of a Young Man" and to appear under the oblique pseudonym Felix de St. Vincent.²⁷

The reader who wishes to study *Writing Sampler* in the context of his projected but unpublished work is invited to read in the following order: (1) *The Crisis and a Crisis in the Life of an Actress*;²⁸ (2) "A Eulogy on Autumn";²⁹ (3) "Rosencrütze as Hammer";³⁰ (4) "Writing Sampler."³¹ Situated in "The Writings of a Young Man," "Writing Sampler" would have centered on esthetic considerations and been an example of the comparability of esthetic and religious interests in the stages of an individual's life.³² Standing by itself, "Writing Sampler" is a polemical miscellany like *Pegasus*, although Kierkegaard intended to emphasize the satirical and ironical elements in the sequel even more than he had in *Pegasus*.³³

"Writing Sampler" remained among Kierkegaard's unpublished papers during his lifetime, and *Pegasus* itself was little noticed in the months after its publication. Only two contemporary reviews appeared in the Danish press, and, like most of Kierkegaard's works, the greater number of the 525 copies of *Pegasus* printed in 1844 remained unsold after a few years and were purchased as remnants by C. A. Reitzel in 1847.³⁴ *Pegasus* was not reprinted during Kierkegaard's lifetime and did not again appear

²⁷ See Supplement, p. 100 (Pap. VII, 379). The Swedish version, if it is literally translated as "mystification," comes from St. Vincent.

²⁸ See KPW XVII, pp. 301–2 (S. 180, 2–40).

²⁹ See Supplement, pp. 157–60 (Pap. VII^B 205–30).

³⁰ See Supplement, pp. 160–62 (Pap. VII^B 211–13). This is a brief sketch for an essay on the performance of a Danish actor, Christian Niemann Axelsen (1796–1861), in the part of Hamlet in J. L. Heiberg, *De Udvalgte Sættninge* (J. L. Heiberg, I, VII) (Copenhagen: 1833–34, 1838, 1833–56), IV, pp. 223–248.

³¹ See *Arbejdet*, pp. 69–73 (Pap. VI^B 2: 14–20).

³² See *Calix*, KPW XVII (51–8).

³³ See Supplement, p. 127 (Pap. V A 49).

³⁴ By 1847, 378 copies remained unsold. See *Erstatningsskema* (The Remuneration Statement) of *Pegasus* (1844), pp. 1–2, in *Manuskript* (1955), pp. 18–19.

in print until the publication of the first critical edition of the works. Since Kierkegaard's *Småleder*,²² in 1910–26, “Writing Samples” was first printed in 1911 and 1916 in volumes V and VII of *Søren Kierkegaard's Papers*.²³ With a few noteworthy exceptions, scholars have paid little attention to either work.²⁴ *Papers* is rarely mentioned in secondary studies, and even one of Kierkegaard's most sympathetic American biographers suggested that it would never be translated into English. It was, Walter Lowrie said, “an amusing book only for those who are familiar with Copenhagen in the 1840s.”²⁵ After rendering *Papers* into German, Emanuel Hirsch cooperatively observed that a wealth of contemporary allusion and concrete wit make it “a work difficult to translate.”²⁶ The same may be said of its sequel, “Writing Samples.” Like *Papers* it is a work concerned of the historical particular.

These are, indeed, Kierkegaard's Copenhagen books, intractably linked to the city, its time, and specific individuals.²⁷ They are the narrations of a writer with Copenhagen in his marrow, and reveal them to walk down the streets of that city in the middle of the nineteenth century, to meet its inhabitants, and to enter their lives. If only for this, *Papers* and “Writing Samples” make

²² MNIV, ed. A. B. Drachmann, [1: Holsten and M. G. Lange] (Copenhagen: Gyldendal, 1910–26).

²³ VI–XII, ed. P. A. Holten, V. Kallin and E. Lundeberg, (Copenhagen: Gyldendal, 1911–26).

²⁴ In addition to the essays, see also in Nyberg-Gunnar, II, 15, June 30, 1847, vol. 20 of *Årsmøder i Kirkehistorisk Selskab*; review was “En Opvækkelse, *Udvalgte af Søren Kierkegaard's Skrifter*,” *Den Nordiske*, no. July 2, 1841, pp. 294–300.

²⁵ Note that the up-to-date biographies of Kierkegaard have given *Papers* no attention. See, for example, Kierkegaard & Kierkegaard, ed. George L. Veggeus (London: Francis and Taylor, Press, 1989), p. 10; and note.

²⁶ Walter Lowrie, *The Søren Kierkegaard* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1943), p. 251.

²⁷ See “Eggenheds Udmærkede og Udmærkede Udmærkede,” in *Søren Kierkegaard, De Bagvendte Tidenes, Christiania Højskole- og tryk. Forlags- Hirsch, Odense, det. Dagens Bøger, Verlag, 1952*, p. 8.

²⁸ Niels Tackrup called *Papers* Kierkegaard's “Great Copenhagen” book. See *The Copenhagen of Kierkegaard, Bøgerne Kierkegaardens I XXVI* (Copenhagen: C. A. Reitzels Forlag, 1878–88), XI, p. 131.

enjoyable and historically informative reading. Yet Kierkegaard did not write merely to amuse and inform. His intent in these works is to grasp the eternal through the customary, to approach the enduring through the ephemeral, and above all, to engage the individual through the illustrative. Of this strategy Nicolai Notitzke observed: "Even an author who in his work cautions the times may nevertheless in his preface accommodate himself to custom in trivial matters and is thereby put to the test in many a collision—very dull for the observer—with regard to law (in and how)."¹¹

As noted in his *Relevanter, æstetiske samtale* studied by Kierkegaard, "various a question from Partridge: 'Why all this preface?'"¹² One answer to the question is to catch the reader unawares: "If you wish to draw his attention, you should imply that the subject does not affect him, or is trivial or insignificant. But observe, all this has nothing to do with the subject itself."¹³ Perusing the prefaces of the happy but hapless unpublished writer in little Denmark, Nicolai Notitzke, the contemporary reader may be tempted to think this volume a literary leak through a time and place vanished, a parasite that never was and still is not a tick, at most no more than a scab on small town pretensions. Yet at this point a troubling thought may invade the reader's mind: "Everyone says material for parody in well-known life," Kierkegaard once remarked, but few recognize the large type represented by the small.¹⁴ Who is the object of the fun in such a parody? Only the properly self-interested will recognize themselves as the people parodied and thus reckon with the argument animating this curious work: if, as Nicolai Notitzke says, "Writing a preface is like dragging someone's doorknob to trick him,"¹⁵ the reader of this work can expect to meet only himself at himself on the doorstep.

¹¹ P. 3.

¹² *Arvid Inge Rønne* (1814–1884), in *The Complete Works of Søren Kierkegaard* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1994), II, 1–2260.

¹³ *Ibid.*

¹⁴ *JN* 5246 *Q* (in 2A 128).

¹⁵ P. 5.

What Kierkegaard once said about his own life in Copenhagen may well serve to introduce *Dejars* to the contemporary reader: "The only person I can say I love is he, when he comes, when I call my reader, who in peace and quiet will be able to sit and purely intelligently enjoy the course I have allowed Copenhagen to perform just by living here."¹⁶ At the same time, however, Kierkegaard warns the reader in a less wistful mood with a more firm scholarly intent: "It states the limits of the esthetic, it articulates the possibility of ethical striving, and it pretends an invitation to Christian faith. . . . [I]f from a poetic point of view it is not at all interesting . . . poetically it must be abbreviated. So it will be for my reader. But in and with the daimon begins the religious. . . ."¹⁷ While relating the temptations of the genetic fallacy, the interested individual may find these observations a guide to locating *Dejars* and the "Writing Sampler" in Kierkegaard's authorship and a key to reading them.

¹⁶ PKV, 4783, 10, 12, 5471.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*

PREFACES

*LIGHT READING FOR PEOPLE IN VARIOUS
ESTATES ACCORDING TO TIME
AND OPPORTUNITY*

by *Nicolaus Notabene*

It is a frequently commented experience that a remark, a brief thing, a careless utterance, an unguarded exclamation, a casual glance, an involuntary gesture have provided the opportunity to slip into a person and discover something that had escaped more careful observation. Last, however, this insignificant remark be distorted and become pompous. I shak for the moment forego further pursuit of it and get on with my project. In relation to a book a prologue is a triviale, and yet by means of a more careful comparison of prologues, would one not gain an opportunity for observation at a bargain price? In the scholarly world much is made of classifying literature and assigning the writing of each individual author to its proper place in the age and the writing of the age in that of the human race. Yet no one thinks about what might be gained if one or another *literary* (literary type) could be trained to read only prologues, but to do it so thoroughly that he would begin with the earliest times and advance through all the centuries down to our own day. Prologues are characterized by the accidental, like dialects, idioms, colloquialisms, they are connotated by fashion in a way entirely different from the way words are — they change like clothing. Now they are long, now short; now bold, now shy; now stiffly formal, now slapdash; now scornful and almost repellant, now self-confident and shameless; now not entirely without an eye for the weaknesses of the book, now stricken with blindness, now perceiving these better than anyone else; now the preface is the best distillation of the product, now an aftertaste of it. And all of this is purely ceremonial. Even an author who in his work defies one time may nevertheless in the preface accommodate himself to custom in trivial matters and is thereby put to the test in many a collision — very good for the mirror — with regard to how in and how. Indeed, the more I think of this, the richer the yield promised by such a study seems to me. Just think of the contrast, the Greek *μῆτις*

that would furnish a superb basis for the presentation of the results. But I halt this flight of thought, which would probably lead me astray since I lack the equipment.

The preface has received its deathblow in recent scholarship. Looked at from its point of view, an older author easily becomes a pitiful figure over whom one does not know whether to laugh or to cry, because his halting manner in getting to the point makes him comic, and his affectation, as if there were anyone who cared about him, makes him pathetic. Nowadays a situation like this cannot be repeated, because when one begins the book with the subject and the system with nothing, there apparently is nothing left over to say in a preface. This state of affairs has given me occasion to become aware that the preface is an altogether unique kind of literary production, and since it is obsolete, since it is high time for it to liberate itself like everything else, in this way it can still come to be something good. The incommensurable, which in an earlier period was placed in the preface to a book, can now find its place in a preface that is not the preface to any book. I believe that in this way the conflict will be settled to mutual satisfaction and benefit, if the preface and the book cannot be hitched up together, then let the one give the other a degree of vivacity.

The most recent scholarly method has made me aware that a word would have to come from a book. My mind will be this, to make the book an answer, now there is only a phenomenon that points to the deeper reason. Every eschentially cultivated author surely has had moments when he did not care to write a book but when he really wanted to write a preface to a book, no matter whether it was by himself or by someone else. This indicates that a preface is essentially different from a book and that to write a preface is something entirely different from writing a book; if not, this word would express its fairly when one had written a book, or when one imagined that one would write it just as one superficially imagines it, and thus means the question of whether one should write the preface first or last. Nevertheless, as soon as a person is in one of these situations, he either has had a subject or imagines having it. But now when lacking also this he desires to write a preface, it is easy to perceive that this must not deal with

a subject, because in that case the preface itself would become a book, and the question of the preface and the book would be pushed aside. The preface as such, the liberated preface, must then have no subject to treat but must deal with nothing, and insofar as it seems to do so something and deal with something, this must nevertheless be an illusion and a fictitious motion.

The preface is thereby defined purely lyrically and defined according to its concept, while in the popular and traditional sense the preface is a convention according to period and custom. A preface is a mood. Writing a preface is like sharpening a scythe, like tuning a guitar, like talking with a child, like spilling out of the window. One does not know how it comes about; the desire comes upon one, the desire to think fancifully in a productive mood, the desire to write a preface, the desire to do these things *à la manière suédoise* (in a low whisper's night fall).² Writing a preface is like ringing someone's doorbell to tickle him, like walking by a young lady's window and gazing at the paving stones; it is like swinging one's cane in the air to let the wind, like doffing one's hat although one is greeting nobody.³ Writing a preface is like having done something that justifies claiming a certain attention, like having something on one's conscience that tempts confidentiality, like bowing invisibly to the dance although one does not move, like pressing hard with the left leg, pulling the reins to the right,⁴ bearing the social sea "Dés" and oneself not caring a straw for the whole world; it is like being alone without having the slightest inconvenience of being alone, like standing on Vaudby Hill⁵ and gazing at the wild geese.⁶ Writing a preface is like arriving by stagecoach at the first station, stopping in the dark shed, having a presentation of what will appear, seeing the gate and then the open sky, gazing at the continually receding road beyond, catching a glimpse of the pregnant mystery of the forest, the alluring fading away of the footpath; it is like hearing the sound of the posthorn and the beckoning invitation of the echo, like hearing the powerful crack of the coachman's whip and the horse's perplexed repetition and the jovial conversation of the travelers. Writing a preface is like having arrived, standing in a comfortable parlor, greeting longing's desired object, sitting in an easy chair, filling a pipe, lighting it—and then

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